



EVERY DAY IN EVERY WAY

## USDA's Cultural Transformation Action Items

- LEADERSHIP
- RECRUITMENT & RETENTION
- TALENT MANAGEMENT
- EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT
- CUSTOMER FOCUS & COMMUNITY OUTREACH

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# MyUSDA

## A Progress Report for Employees on USDA's Cultural Transformation

Volume 6, Issue 4

January 2016

### USDA Celebrates MLK Day/National Day of Service

USDA celebrated the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. by commemorating the National Day of Service and announcing this year's Drum Major for Service Awards. The award name comes from Dr. King's commitment to being a "drum major" by seeking greatness through service and love.

*"...If you want to say that I'm a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice...Say that I was a drum major for peace. I was a drum major for righteousness. And all of the other shallow things will not matter...I just want to leave a committed life behind... I just want to be there in love and in justice and in truth and in commitment to others, so that we can make of this old world a new world."*

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



Charles Kelly/AP Photo

#### Individual Drum Major for Service Awardees

AMS-Washington, DC—Leon Ray Reynolds, Supervisory Compliance Officer  
 AMS-Fredericksburg, VA—Yowei M. Peralta, Senior Marketing Specialist  
 AMS-Edward, MS—Rhonda Arta Griffin, Agricultural Commodity Grader  
 FSA-Greenfield, MA—Carrie L. Novak, Senior Loan Officer  
 FS-La Grande, OR—Dennis B. Rea, Maintenance Mechanic  
 FS-Prescott, AZ—Peter Alan Gordon, Fire Staff Officer  
 FS-Mad River, CA—Angelique Russell, Visitor Information Assistant  
 FS-Washington, DC—Dr. Sharon Parker, Science Synthesis Program Manager & Quality of Information Officer  
 NFC-New Orleans, LA—Mary A. Porter, Systems Accountant  
 NRCS-Menomonie, WI—Tamara Pellett, Soil Conservationist Technician  
 RD-Tipton, IA—Gregory Glenn Thompson, State Environmental Coordinator & Construction Analyst

#### Group/Organization Drum Major for Service Awardees

APHIS -Riverdale, MD, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Legislative and Public Affairs Group  
 NRCS-Brownsburg, IN, National Organization of Professional Black Natural Resources Conservation Service Employees  
 REE-Washington, DC, Research, Education and Economics Drum Majors For Service Group

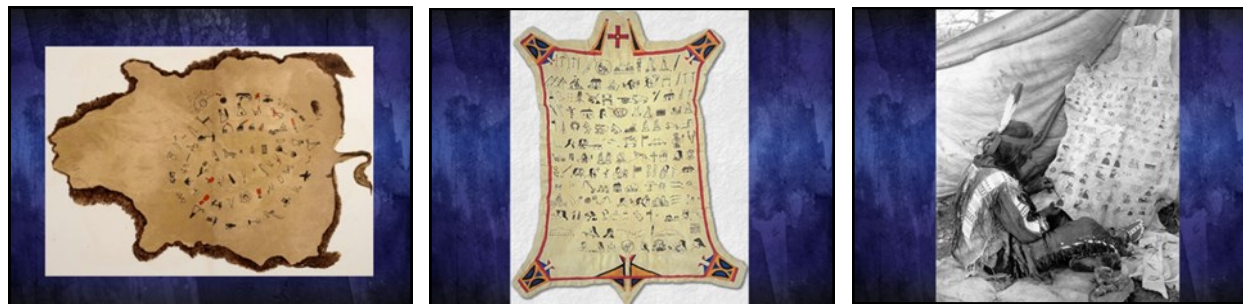
## Rural Development Celebrates Native American Heritage

**By Alisa Dahl, Rural Development**

USDA Rural Development employees in North Dakota celebrated Native American Heritage Month in November by learning about the “winter count,” a chronological pictograph representation of each year in history for the Lakota tribe that goes back as far as the year 900 A.D.

A winter count is painted onto buffalo or elk hides. In the latter part of the 19th century, they were painted onto canvas. These counts provided the owner or memory group with a traceable past, the pictograph often representative of a successful high-point of that year.

Presenter Dakota Wind Goodhouse is one of only three tribal members who practice this art form of depicting the passing of each winter through a pictograph. Mr. Goodhouse is originally from Fort Yates, ND and enrolled in the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. He is an author and instructor of Lakota History and Culture at United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck, North Dakota. The presentation took place at the Rural Development State Office with staff in outlying offices viewing via video teleconferencing.



Examples of pictographs (courtesy of Mr. Dakota Wind Goodhouse.) The circular pattern in some of the winter counts represent the never ending circle of life.

## Federal Women's Program Host Women's Networking Event

**By Denise C. Freeman, USDA Office of Human Resources Management**

“Women Empowering Women,” was the theme of the December Women’s Networking Luncheon. This was the focus of a diverse group of nearly 50 federal women employees who shared their stories, ideas, information, and developed new contacts. Guest speakers talked about the need to take risks, persevere through the tough times, stay the course, and seize opportunities when they are presented. The USDA Federal Women’s Program will continue these ongoing efforts to further the career advancement of women. For more information, contact Denise Freeman at [Denise.Freeman@dm.usda.gov](mailto:Denise.Freeman@dm.usda.gov).

*Pictured (from left to right):*

Melody C. Bell, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary, Department of Energy (DOE); Dr. Zina B. Sutch, Director, Diversity, Recruitment, and Work/Life Division, USDA Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM/DM/USDA); Anne Alonzo, Administrator, Agricultural Marketing Service; Denise Freeman, PMC Fellow and Diversity and Inclusion Program Manager (OHRM/DM/USDA); and Jacqueline Padron, Diversity and Recruitment Programs, Senior Team Lead (OHRM/DM/USDA.)



## Man's Best Friend Assists U.S. Forest Fire Crew

By Keith Hackbarth, U.S. Forest Service

U.S. Forest Service employees from all over the United States gear up each year for fire season. For the Darby Sula District fire crew on the Bitterroot National Forest in Montana, this year's training included a four-legged recruit.

Jade, a beautiful two year old German Shepherd Service Dog, was ready for whatever was thrown her way, including the slobber ball that had a small resemblance to a tennis ball not so long ago.

Jade appeared ready for the adventure and challenge of being on a wildland fire crew for the summer. The Service Dog (and her handler) joined the crew thanks to the Northern Region's Veterans Recruitment Authority program (VRA).



With a phone call to the Darby Sula District Fire Management Officer (DFMO) on the Bitterroot National Forest, leaders made a plan. With some reasonable accommodations, a dog kennel and having the DFMO or Assistant FMO care for Jade when there was a fire call, the deal was struck.

On day one, the crew provided a locker for gear and started to get acquainted with Jade. The Service Dog began to do all the normal things tasked to a fire crew: sawing out roads, working in fuel units, and patrolling forest roads, all while waiting for the call. When the time came and the call announced, the pre-plan worked. Jade stayed behind, not happy, but still waiting patiently until it was time for the duty officer to head home.

The season can only be considered a huge success for all parties involved. Jade and her companion became an integral part of the fire family. The rest of the crew can't wait for both of their friends/crew members to return next year if they choose.

### Upcoming at USDA

## **Black History Month Observance**

**Thursday, February 25, 2016**

**10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. at the Jefferson Auditorium in Washington, DC**

**View recordings from many of USDA's Special Observances at**  
<http://www.dm.usda.gov/employ/observances.htm>.

***Employees receive one hour of diversity training for each USDA Special Observance attended.***



## Maine USDA Rural Development Takes Proactive Approach to Investing in Employee Security

**By Virginia Manuel, Rural Development**

Employee safety and security have always been at the top of my list of responsibilities as State Director of USDA Rural Development in Maine. With a workforce of 58 that works directly with the public to deliver essential programs that impact individuals, businesses, lenders, and communities, my staff's personal security is something that the USDA, as a proactive government agency, and I take very seriously.

On November 18 and 19, 2015, our staff welcomed Federal Protective Service Inspector Talis Jordans, from the Department of Homeland Security, to provide training in Bangor and Lewiston, Maine. Talis is an Active Firearms Instructor, a National Weapons Detection Training Program Inspector, and a Field Training Evaluation Program Instructor. The important security training that Talis provided to USDA Rural Development staff addressed active shooter situations, suspicious package incidents, email and cyber security incidents, and more.

The valuable training not only included an in-depth review of how an employee should handle each type of security incident, but also a visit to each USDA Rural Development office in Maine to specifically assess and review how to handle life-threatening situations such as an active shooter in the workplace.

Active shooter incidents, both in public places and the workplace, are on the rise in the United States according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Additionally, as public servants, government employees are at increased risk of workplace violence. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, rates of workplace violence in the government sector are more than three times higher than the rate for private sector employees. These violent incidents unfold in seconds, and it is critical that our staff has the training Talis provided, to know how to act quickly to protect themselves and their coworkers.

USDA Rural Development takes the threat of workplace violence and staff safety very seriously. Some of the precautions we have taken in Maine include the installation of keypad systems that require an individual to enter a passcode before entering agency space, security cameras, distribution of the Occupant Emergency Plan to all staff, installation of Automated External Defibrillator units at all Maine Rural Development Offices, and annual Aglearn courses on workplace security.

I am pleased that our Maine USDA Rural Development staff received this important training, and am grateful to be a part of a government agency that invests in the safety and well-being of its greatest asset—its people.



USDA Rural Development staff listens as Department of Homeland Security Federal Protective Service Inspector Talis Jordans and Bangor Police Sergeant Rob Angelo discuss what to do in case of an active shooter at the USDA Rural Development State Office in Bangor, Maine.

## January is National Mentoring Month

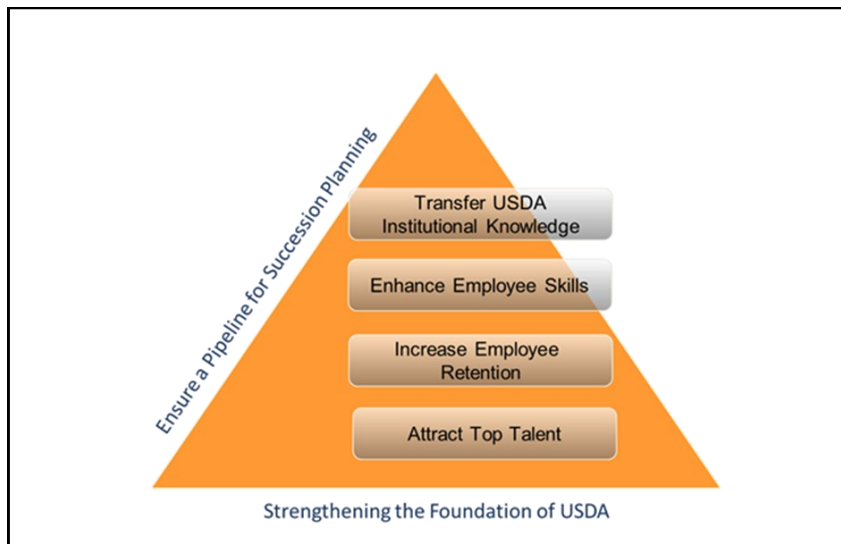
**By Roderick Mance, USDA Office of Human Resources Management**

USDA is marking National Mentoring Month by celebrating the mentoring movement, which is growing throughout the Department and across the Federal government.

USDA has an outstanding Mentoring Program and has shared best practices with the Office of Personnel Management and other federal agencies. In FY 2015, there were more than 600 formal mentoring pairs at USDA. The program is a cost-efficient, personalized experience that helps attract and retain top talent, enhance employee skills and abilities, and transfer institutional knowledge.

Mentoring is a voluntary relationship between a protégé, who has expressed an interest in developing new skills or opportunities in a particular area, and a more experienced mentor, who has knowledge or experience in the protégé's area of interest. The formal program is designed to provide employees with opportunities to form new connections within the agency, broaden employee experience and career development opportunities, and assist in developing goals. A formal mentoring relationship is considered to be a one-on-one relationship that lasts longer than one quarter.

USDA is playing a key role in the growing popularity of mentoring across the federal government. The personalized nature of mentoring makes it an excellent employee development tool. USDA's succession planning efforts benefit from the Senior Executive Staff's continued support. Visit the [USDA Mentoring Portal](#) today and click on the [Contact Us](#) page for more information on your specific agency's mentoring program.



## USDA Agencies Combine for Successful Recruitment Effort

**By Karen Comfort, Agricultural Marketing Service**

On December 3, 2015, recruiters for the Agricultural Marketing Service, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Food Safety and Inspection Service, Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights participated in an on-site recruitment event for recent graduates at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez.

Together, the six USDA agencies and offices that participated in the event were recruiting for 56 different positions in 30 different locations across the country. As more than 510 highly qualified recent graduates applied for the 56 positions, the recruitment event was a success, and it is anticipated that all vacant positions will be filled.

The USDA Pathways Recent Graduates Program offers pathways through which students and recent graduates across the country can become civil servants, work with USDA, and fulfill our nation's needs in the agricultural sector.

In addition to offering employment and meaningful training and career development opportunities to qualified recent graduates, the USDA Recent Graduates Program enables USDA to recruit among segments of America's population that are under-represented within USDA. By ensuring that USDA staff reflects the diversity in America, we ensure that we continue to be the People's Department, providing quality services to all.

## NRCS ADR Program Staff Awarded for Exemplary Service

By Giavanna Pullen-White, Natural Resources Conservation Service

In October 2015, USDA's Early Resolution and Conciliation Division (ERCD) recognized the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for its achievement in Program Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) and Employment ADR. NRCS Chief Jason Weller accepted an "Outstanding Performance in Employment ADR" for exemplary service and program success.

Credits go to the staff ADR Specialists, Giavanna Pullen-White and Traci Lillard, who coordinated the ADR service and worked with all parties involved. The ADR program in NRCS was recognized for providing timely ERCD reports; participating in the annual "Conflict Resolution Day" event sponsored by ERCD; increasing the ADR offer rate; and, utilizing the database which monitors all facets of the ADR program, thus exceeding all program goals focusing on reporting, utilization and training.

During FY 2015, the ADR staff in the Civil Rights Division conducted 249 consultations with employees, managers and supervisors regarding the use of the ADR program in respective stages of conflict resolution such as early Intervention, EEO, and the grievance process. The consultation method served as an effective way to increase participants' knowledge of the ADR program as well as alleviate pre-conceived notions regarding the process. This practice also eliminated any barriers the parties would encounter during their participation in mediation.

In addition, the ADR staff also hosted a "Conflict Management" training series for employees which included two webinar sessions, "Working with You is Tough" and "The Bully at Work." Because of this initiative, NRCS trained over 1,200 employees on conflict management.

Working together collaboratively, NRCS is able to provide ADR services to all customers and employees. Congratulations, NRCS!

## FNCS Continues to Give Back

By Susan M. Siemietkowski, Food and Nutrition Service

Staff from the Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services spent the morning of December 22, 2015, sorting food at the Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC). Employees from the Nutrition Promotion and Technical Assistance Division of Child Nutrition Programs volunteered at AFAC, a community-based non-profit that provides supplemental groceries to nearly 2,220 families each week. This kind of teamwork, which underscores Cultural Transformation's "Customer Service and Community Outreach" pillar, also demonstrates dedication to FNCS' mission of ending hunger and improving nutrition! Well done.





If you'd like to share your feedback about Cultural Transformation, telework, diversity, or any other aspect of work/life at USDA, send an email to: [MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov) or visit USDA's [Work/Life and Wellness](#) community website if you have access to [USDA Connections](#).



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**If you have ideas for future articles, contact us at [MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov)**

### Submit Your Article to MyUSDA

The monthly deadline for submissions is the end of the first week of each month.

## Guidance on Submissions to MyUSDA

Submissions to MyUSDA should indicate progress that you, your agency, or your mission area have achieved toward implementing the Secretary's Cultural Transformation (CT) Initiative. The ideal submission includes photos or graphics along with a brief description of the event. The ideal word count for articles is 150-200. All submissions are subject to editing and Departmental review.

Submissions may be in the form of a traditional article with a byline, a first-person account, or any work-related activity, event, or observance demonstrating the Secretary's Cultural Transformation Action Items: Leadership; Recruitment & Retention; Talent Management; Employee Development; and, Customer Focus & Community Outreach.

Email submissions or further inquiries to [MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov).